The Panji-Prabandha

(a study in social history of Mithilā and eastern India)

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Introduction :

Society in mediaeval Mithilā, like mediaeval India, presented the picture of a feudal structure with the king or rājā at its head. There was a vast difference in standard of living amongst different classes of people. While the nobles and the zamindars rolled in wealth and extravagances, the lot of the lower classes was hard and they faced chronic economic depression and oppression.

The distinctive feature of the Hindu society during the period was the system of castes and sub-castes as it is today. Although, with the advent of Islam and the fall of the old time ruling classes the legal and formal powers of the Brāhmaṇas had undergone a considerable change, with the elimination of the moral rivalry of the Kṣatriyas, the authority and personal influence of the Brāhmaṇas increased among the Hindu classes. This naturally led to more restriction of caste-rules and a wider caste-jurisdiction in marriage and diet and a few other spheres that were left to them. The introduction of Islam was therefore not a fundamental revolution in the basic conditions of life, for, though it affected a change in classes and their relative position, it could not uproot the old institutions. Mithilā or Tirhut still continued to be a strong-hold of Brāhmaṇism and was averse to all such changes and influences accruing from the new order that came to dominate other parts of India. In fact, in this part of the country Islam practically succumbed to the spirit of class-division and forgot all about the message of the *Qurān.*

The advent of the Muslims in India in the twelfth-thirteenth century A. D. brought in its wake another crisis in a more menacing from. The Hindus

had lost their political independence, and the strain on the cohesion of the Hindu society was fast reaching the breaking point. It was at this critical hour in their history that the Brāhmaṇas essayed and re-inforced the tottering edifices as far as possible. The result was the writing of Digests and Codification of the laws and regulations and rules of conduct in various walks of life. These Smṛti works, because of their 'intrinsic merit and innate strength inspite of age-old aberrations, could preserve the individuality of the Hindu society. Mithilā being one of the chief centres of Hindu learning, it is not surprising to find an individual tradition of the texts.[1]

Thus, the structure of the Hindu society as a whole presented the same age-old spectacle with Brāhmaṇas, Kṣatriyas, Vaiśyas and Śūdras consituting its vital limbs with their privileges and traditions intact, inspite of ruthless hammering of Islam and numerous shake-ups from without. There have been little changes in the mode of the life of the inhabitants of this region who cling fast to their ancient ways and manners. A land with an ancient history, traditions of which it still retains today, Mithilā, for centuries, has been a trait too proud to admit other nationalities to intercourse on equal terms, and has passed through conquest after conquest from the north, from the east and from the west without changing its ancestral peculiarities.[2] This Brāhmaṇical domination has left ineffaceable marks upon the rest of the population. The laws of Manu had still no sympathy for the down-trodden fraction of the society, and the Brāhmaṇas resisted for long the foreign influences with all their zeal and resources. The result was that Mithilā remained the least influenced tract with little to gain from the new light that flashed over the cultural horizon of the country.

Of the various castes and sub-castes, the Brāhmaṇas, though not so strong numerically, were by far the most important caste owing to their hereditary priestly influences. The majority belonged to the Maithila or Tirhutiya sub-caste which was again divided into five hypergamous groups—Śrotriya or Soti, Joga or Yogya, Pāñjibadha, Jaibāra and Nāgara, These different

1 *JBORS*, XIII (Search for Sanskrit and Prākṛta *MSS.* In Bihar and Orissa, iii-iv).

2 G. A. Grierson, *Linguistic Survey of India*, vol. V, pt. ii, p. 4.

groups still carry on more or less in the same manner as they were enjoined to do when these sub-classes came into existence, owing to the introduction and consolidation of the famous Maithila *Pañjī* or *Pañjī-Prabandha* in the time of Harisiṁhadeva, the last celebrated king of the Karṇāṭa dynasty of Mithilā.[3]

II

The Pañjī-Prabandha : Its Origin :

The advent of the fourteenth century witnessed a significant change in the social structure of Maithilas—significant because it violently shook up the structure of the society. The new change was the introduction of the Maithila *Kulīnism*—a legacy later borrowed by Bengal (?) and Assam. The credit for this so-called re-organisation of the society (1310–1313 A. D.) goes entirely to King Harisiṁhadeva, and as a consequence the Maithilas (both Brāhmaṇas and Karṇa Kāyasthas) gave birth to an elaborate system of genealogical records, called in common parlance, the *Pañjīs* or *Pañjī-Prabandha* which may be compared with the *Kuljī* texts of Bengal, the *Burañjī* texts of Assam, the *Madalasā Pañjī* of Orissa as well as the genealogies of the kings of Nepal and the early Indian records giving genealogical accounts. It is said that the system was introduced with a view to protecting the purity of blood in Maithila society by making people record their ancestry, and avoiding the forbidden degrees of relationship in marriages.

How did the *Pañjī* (or *Pañjī-Prabandha*) come into existence ? As marriage is a religious rite it must be in conformity with Śāstric injunctions. A bride must be more than fifth in descent on the mother's side and more than sixth on the father's from the last common ancestor of her and the bride-groom. Accordingly, one can not marry the daughter of one's step-mother's brother, nor can he marry a girl who is an offspring of his grandfather, and so forth. Any infringement of these rules not only invalidates the marriage, but is a grievous sin, and as a safeguard against such marriages, entries of the relationships with names of members of all the different Maithila families are kept from ancient time by the Pañjīkārs as Panjiārs (genealogists) of Mithilā.

3 Upendra Thakur, *History of Mithilā*, chap. VII.

It would be wrong to attribute the origin of the *Pañji-Prabandha* to King Harisiṁhadeva of Mithilā during whose time (1285-1324 A. D.) the re-organisation of the Maithila society, based on the *Pañjis* was effected. As a matter of fact, this custom of keeping genealogies goes far back to the time of Kumārila Bhaṭṭa (7th century A. D.) and even earlier. Harisiṁhadeva simply ordered detailed genealogies to be scientifically recorded for the first time in the *Pañjis* as we shall see later. These records were kept both by the Maithila Brāhmaṇas and Kāyasthas as well as some other castes such as the *Surī* (*telī*, oilman) whose genealogical records are still lying with one Surī-Pañjīkāra of Madhepur (Darbhanga).[4] In many epigraphic records of the early period we have short genealogical lists of the kings by whose order the inscriptions came to be engraved. The Allahabad Pillar inscription also furnishes us with a genealogical list of Samudragupta (4th century A. D.). But, of these genealogical epigraphic records, the Pañcobha Copper plate of Saṁgrāmagupta (12th-13th century A. D.) is the most noteworthy as it gives a list of kings belonging to six generations[5] in strict accordance with Śāstric injunctions. From one of the introductory verses in the *Pañjī-Prabandha* it is clear that it was re-organised and re-edited by several scholars (*budhajana*) of Mithilā about 34 years after the birth of Harisiṁhadeva. That the tradition of keeping genealogical records was quite old is also evident from the mention of "*samūha-lekhyāni*" in the first chapter of Kumārila's famous work on mīmāṁsā, known as *Tantravārtika*. Kumārila refers to the ancient tradition of keeping genealogical records (*samūha-lekhya*)[6-7] by the nobles (*kulīna*) of the society to protect their caste and purity of blood. Infact, this *samhūa-lekhya* of Kumārila later became the basis of what is now known as the *pañjī prabandha* or the *kulji* texts or the *Burañjī* texts etc. It seems that in the early periods it was confined

4 Cf. Binod Bihari Varma, *Maithila Karaṇa Kāyasthaka Pañjikā Sarvekṣaṇa*, p. 39.

5 Upendra Thakur, *Some Aspects of Indian History and Culture*, pp. 29-33 ("Panchobha Copper plate of Saṁgrāmagupta").

6-7 *Tantravārttika*, Chap. I, II. 2 : "विशिष्टेनैव हि प्रयत्नेन महाकुलीनाः परिरक्षन्ति आत्मानम् । अनेनैव हि हेतुना राजभिर्ब्राह्मणैश्च स्वपितृपितामहादिवंशपारम्पर्याविस्मरणार्थं समूहलेख्यानि प्रवर्तितानि । तथा च प्रतिकुलं गुणदोषस्मरणात्तदनुरूपाः प्रवृत्तिनिवृत्तयो दृश्यन्ते ।"

to only the higher sections of the society who took extra care to protect their caste and purity of blood by negotiating marriages either with their equals or one higher in grade.

But during the time of Harisiṁhadeva it came to be imposed on all sections of the Brāhmaṇas and the Kāyasthas of Mithilā. Almost all the Smṛti writers–Manu, Yājñavalkya, Gautama, Hārita, *Viṣṇu purāṇa* and others[8] stress the need to maintain purity of blood and caste to keep the fire of culture and religion aflame.[9] It was, however, during the fourteenth century A. D. that this *samūha-lekhya* received royal patronage and came to be renowned as *Pañjī-prabandha* in Mithilā, *Kulajī* texts in Bengal, *Burañjī* texts in Assam, *Madalasā pañjī* in Orissa, or the *vaṁśāvalī* of the kings of Nepal. Genealogy of an individual family is popularly known as "vaṁśavṛkṣa" which maintains a list of sixteen generations, eight from mother's side and eight from father's side. These are the sixteenth generations or *kulas* in which the bride would be placed in sixth pedigree, and a knowledge of these *kulas* is imperative to avoid such marriages as are not sanctioned by the Śāstras. There is a reference to it in the *Bible* also. Moreover, people maintained their genealogical list sometimes on palmleaves, stone-slabs, copper-plates in the form of inscriptions etc. before the birth of the *pañjī-prabandha* in its consolidated form. We have many such epigraphic records found in south-east Asia of 10th-12th centuries A. D. which mention the genealogies of kings of Hindu origin. The Sdok Kok Thom Inscription[10] of Jayavarman II of Cambodia (Kambuja) gives us a dynastic list of kings from Udayādityavarman II to Jayavarman II which covers a period of about 250 years and is thus unique from genealogical point of view. The Javanese *pañjī* cycle of narratives is yet another instance in point[11].

By the fourteenth century A. D., the population of the Maithila Brāhmaṇas had increased immensely and they were scattered in different places. Moreover, Brāhmaṇas other than the Maithilas had also come and settled in Mithilā, and the necessity for more organized action in respect of the marriage

8 Varma, *Pañjikā Sarvekṣaṇa*, pp. 32-33.
9 Also Cf. *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Up.*, 6. 5.
10 R. C. Majumdar, *Inscriptions of Kamboja*.
11 D. G. E. Hall, *A History of South-East Asia* (3rd Edn.), p. 19.

rules was greatly felt. It was found that the existing record of the above entries (*samūha-lekhya*, kept individually by the high-ups in the society) was defective. The story goes that a Maithila Brāhmaṇa, Paṇḍita Harinātha Upādhyāya, the celebrated author of the *Smṛti-sāra* and one of the recognised authorities on Dharmaśāstra had, by an oversight, contracted a marriage not in consonance with Śāstric texts. Once his wife was alleged to have had an illicit connection with an impure man and made to submit to an ordeal to prove her innocence by taking a fire-ball in her hands—a test in vogue in those days. Soon her hands began to scorch—a contingency possible only in case she was sinful. Knowing that she was perfectly innocent, she solicited re-trial and was tested again. She had used the words : "I have not had intercourse with any impure person" ('*nāhaṁ cāṇḍālagāminī*') at the former ordeal. At the second one she swore : "I have not had intercourse with any impure person other than my husband" ("*nāhaṁ svapativyatirikta cāṇḍālagāminī*"), and this time the fire did not burn her. On careful examination it was found that her husband, Paṇḍita Harinātha Upādhyāya was impure because he had married a lady who was not, as enjoined by the Śāstras, sufficiently removed in descent of relationship. This incident created a deep sensation in the whole of Mithilā,[12] because on further scrutiny it was found that not only Paṇḍita Upādhyāya but many such scholars of his rank had not cared much about the correctness of their genealogical records which resulted in impure marriages throughout the land. We are told that Paṇḍita Upādhyāya felt so much humiliated at this incident that he undertook to write in Sanskrit, and composed in 1326 A. D. (?) a genealogy of the Maithila Brāhnaṇas and Maithila Kāyasthas which is since that year kept with scrupulous exactness upto date with fresh entries made from time to time. King Harisiṁhadeva, the last great Kṣatriya ruler of the Karṇāṭa dynasty of Mithilā, interested himself in the said genealogy and marriage-customs of Mithilā. He not only supervised the marriages done according to the Śāstric rules, but made classification of Maithila Brāhmaṇas and Kāyasthas, according to their religious observances. The Brāhmaṇas–let alone the other castes–were now forced to split up themselves into four sub-castes in order of gradation. Such of the Maithilas who performed the Agnihotra sacrifices and who devoted their time from sunrise to sunset to religous worship, were given the

12 *JBORS*, vol. III, pp. 515-16; Upendra Thakur, *History of Mithila*, pp. 357-58.

first place and called the Śrotriyas (i. e., highest in grade). Next to the Śrotriyas were the Yogyas (deserving) who got the second class and next to the Yogyas were the pañjībaddhas who were placed in the third class and the Jaibāras composed the fourth class.

In justifications of the classification we are told that Harisiṁhadeva caused this classification because he wanted to encourage "religious observances amongst the people to show that in this world and especially so in Mithilā–the country of the Janakas, the king initiated spiritualism should be the ideal of every man[13]". And, it was with a view to perpetuating this ideal and rendering it all the more attractive that he ordered and incorporated the order in the marriage-rules that "distinctive preference should be shown to each other by the marriage-parties" by one lower in grade to the other who is in the higher grade. These rules have been implicitly followed through centuries up to the present time under the supervision of the Mahārājas of Darbhanga. Harisiṁhadeva, the greatest protagonist of these rules, is no more. Even his family has faded away from the memory of the people except the students of history, but the marriage-rules are unaffected and yet dominate the social life of the Maithilas with all their implications.

These rules gave birth to a new class; the class of *pañjīkāras* and *ghaṭakas* (the marriage-contractors). The word *pañjī* means 'register', *pañjīkāra*, the registrar and those included in this register are *pañjībaddha* or registred. King Harisiṁhadeva had made it compulsory for every person to "get a certificate of the fact that the contracting parties are not within the forbidden bounds of consanguinity". It ultimately necessitated a set of authorised genealogists who must discharge this duty to preserve "the purity of blood". As a result, we have the pañjīkāras who kept these genealogical record of gigantic proportions and were authorised to issue such "marriage-certificate" without which no marriage could be contracted or performed.

The procedure was as follows : A Śrotriya (highest in grade) wishing to give his daughter in marriage obtained from an authorised genealogist, called Pañjīkāra or Pañjīāra, an *adhikāramālā* (certificate of right), i. e., a list of persons with the names of their fathers and maternal grandfathers with whom the intended bride had no relationship according to the Śāstric rules and with

13 Upendra Thakur, *op. cit.*, pp. 360-61; *JBORS*, vol. III, pp. 516-17.

whom the marriage was allowable. The person then selected provisionally one or more bride-grooms and obtained a "marriage permit" (*siddhānta*) signed in each case by the Mahārājā of Darbhanga who was supposed to be the head of the Maithila Brāhmaṇas in caste-matters also a remarkable symbol of mediaeval religio-politics practised all the world over. The genealogist (*pañjikāra*) then consulted and read the genealogical tables of both the bride and the bridegroom and solemnly declared in presence of the parties that there was no relationship between the parties, and having assured them of the *asvajana* (absence of relationship), gave his opinion in writing under his signature, and the *asvajana patra*, as it was (and is) called, was taken home by the bride's father and placed before his family goddess by way of dedication

As regards the other divisions—Yogyas, Pañjibaddhas and Jaibāras—the authorised genealogists had general permission of the Mahārāja to settle marriages with due deference to the Śāstric rules and local customs.[14] While deciding about the marriage both the parties settled between themselves about the extent of the distinctive respect or reverence due by one to the other according to custom. Amongst the Śrotriyas the measure of such respect was estimated in rupees. One higher in grade was conventionally supposed to recover from the other who was of the lowet grade, Rs. 500, Rs. 700 and Rs. 900 according to the difference in their grades as compensation for the difference between the caste-status of the respective parties. This amount was not paid but was merely nominal.[15] On mutual agreement the marriages were finally performed according to Vedic rites' i. e, Brahma form, one of the eight forms of marriage, recognised by Manu, the supreme authority. In this form of marriage the father of the bride made a gift or his daughter to a suitable bridegroom, with ornaments, dress and such other property as he could afford to give. This was a pure gift in which money consideration did not enter. Such payment was conventional not only with the Śrotriyas but with all other classes of Maithila Brāhmaṇas. It was the intention of the law-givers that the amount should be proportional to the difference in social rank between the bride and the bridegroom's parties. In recent times, however, this custom

14 U. Thakur, *op. cit.*, pp. 361-62; *JBORS*, vol. III, pp. 513-18.
15 *Ibid.*, p. 518.

has deteriorated to such an extent that it is now getting increasingly difficult for people to contract or negotiate marriages of their daughters for want of money or dowry, the ferocious monster of which is now literally eating into the very vitals of the society.

With the emergence of the *pañjī* the difficulties in the way of a *vaidika* marriage became considerable. The śāstras prohibit marriage between *sapiṇḍas* and *sagotras*. A Maithila Brāhmaṇa can not marry a bride if he and the father of the bride were of the same *gotra*, or if they are agnates of the same family. He can not marry the descendants of the family of his father or grandfather, paternal or maternal, or of his stepmother's brother. Nor can he marry his wife's sister during tho former's life time. A bride must necessarily be more than fifth in descent on her mother's side and more than sixth on her father's side from the last common male-ancestor of herself and the bridegroom. He can not marry in the family of a Brāhmaṇa other than Maithila. There being different sections in one class, one belonging to a particular section must marry in the higher section or in his own, because if he marries in a lower section, his children born of such wife would lose the status of their father, their positions becoming lower than his. And, even in respect of his own or higher sections he should make the selection carefully. Both the bride and the bridegroom should be of noble parentage—both in regard to family and other connections. The Maithila Brāhmaṇas and Kāyasthas have been very keen about these rules, and the higher the class and section to which one belongs, the greater is the stringency with which he observed these rules. These rules however, are not observed so strictly these days and are now gradually falling into disuse.

As the classification of the Maithila Brāhmaṇas was made on a rigid religious basis, they were graded according to their extent of religious observances. Those who devoted their time from sunrises to sunset to their religious worship were given the first class and, in the beginning, such personages were only thirteen in number. Consequently only they and their children of course composed the first class and were named *avadāta* (white, spotless) Śrotriyas. Thus, originally there were only thirteen houses (families) of the Śrotriyas holding equal social rank, and their children were also *avadāta* so long as marriages could be arranged within these thirteen families. But difficulties

arose later, and as a matter of necessity a bride of the Yogya class had sometimes to be accepted with the special permission of the Mahārājā who was their direct religious head. The children born of such marriages were also called Śrotriyas—followers of the Vedas—but they lost the distinction of the *avadāta* (spotless) as they had now inferior blood in their veins; they were considered lower in position than their fathers. As such they were called *Lokas* or *Laukikas* men-descendants of the *avadātas* and of their maternal grandfathers. These *Laukikas*, i. e., the personalities of their maternal grandparents, thus became the standards of their social rank. In course of time, however, such *Laukikas* sprang up with the result that there are at the present time seven sections in the Śrotriya class and about forty *Laukikas* graded according to their importance.[16] The erstwhile social restraints and Śāstric injunctions are now gradually disappearing.

Like the Brāhmaṇas, the Kāyasthas also were forced to split up themselves into two divisions—(1) the Kulīna (i. e. of the high birth) and (ii) the Gṛhastha (i. e., of ordinary birth). They also adopted the same *mūlas* as the Brāhmaṇas.[17] They also got the "certificate of marriage" from their own Pañjīkāras who were known as "Kāyastha-Pañjīkāra".[18]

The motive behind the creation of the *pañjī-prabandha* of the Karṇa (or Karaṇa) Kāyasthas of Mithilā was the same as in the case of the Maithila Brāhmaṇas, i. e., to maintain "purity of blood" and avoid "forbidden degrees of relationship in marriage". From a passage in the Kāyastha *pañjī-prabandha* it is clear that in Śaka saṃvat 1232 = 1310 11 A.D. (Śāke yugma guṇārka) Śrī Śaṁkara Datta Mallika of *Sisaba mūla* was entrusted by king Harisiṁhadeva to prepare the *pañjī* of the Kāyasthas on the same pattern as that of the Brāhmaṇas.[19] From another source also it is clear that the *pañjī-prabandha* was prepared in its present form in Śaka 1232, i. e.,

16 For details, see *JBORS*, vol. III, pp. 517ff.

17 R. K. Choudhary, however, does not agree with this view (*Mithilā in the Age of Vidyāpati*, p. 116).

18 Such genealogical records were not limited to the Brāhmaṇas and Kāyasthas only, those of the Kṣatriyas are also known to have exited (J. K. Mishra) *History of Maithili Literature*, vol. I, p. 30 fn. 78; Das, *Mithilā-Darpaṇa*, p. 16).

19 "शाके युग्म गुणार्के सम्मित वरे भूपाल चूडामणि:"

1310-11 A.D.[20] Yet from another manuscript composed by late Śrī Syāmalāla Choudhary[21], we learn that the *pañjī* was composed in Śaka 1232 and the same was handed over by Śrī Śaṁkara Datta Mallika to his nephew (sister's son) Guṇapati Dāsa of Mohinavāra mūlagrāma.[22] This Guṇapati later came to be one of the famous Kāyastha Pañjīkāras.

Ramānātha Jhā suggests that the *pañjī-prabandha* was finally compiled in Śāke 1248 (1327 A. D.), three years after the end of Harisiṁha's reign, though the work of compilation was started much earlier.[23] Harisiṁha was probably born in Śāke 1216 (= 1294 A.D.[24]) (A.D. 1258 according to others) and it was at his instance that the Paṇḍitas *(budhajana)* undertook the task of compiling the *pañjī*. Though it was completed a few years (three years) after the exit of Harisiṁha from the political scene of Mithilā, yet the entire credit for re-organising the Maithila society in the light of this new social code was given to Harisiṁha for having initiated this bold and revolutionary measure and for this he is still remembered by the people of Mithilā.[25]

But, the suggestion that the *pañjī-prabandha* was compiled by many, and not one, Paṇḍitas *(budhajana)* do not seem convincing in view of the evidences cited above from different sources. In one of the sources we are clearly

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20 R. B. Lal, *Mithilā-Darpaṇa*, pt. I, p. 206.

21 *Vaṁśāvalī Maithila Karṇa Kāyastha Upākhyāna-Pustaka Vaṁśakula-Dīpaka.*

22 *Ibid.*; Quoted Varma, *op. cit.*, p. 46 :

"शाके तुम्म गुणार्के सम्मित बरे भूपाल चूड़ामणिः
तस्माद् करण विज कलितं कायस्थ पञ्जी प्रबन्धः
कृतः तस्माद् मंत्र गुणीनां श्रीगुणपतिः दयावान् ॥
शाके तुम्म गुणार्के सम्मित बरे भूपाल चूड़ामणिः ।
again श्रीमन्महीहरिसिंहदेव विजयी पञ्जीप्रबन्धः कृतः ॥
तस्माद् कर्णं बीज कलितं सद्दिण्डके पुरा ।
कायस्थ बांति मदस्य गुणिनः श्री शंकरदत्तवान्"

(P. Jha, *Mithilā-tattva-vimarśa*, *Vaidehī*, Dec. 1959, p. 454)

23 U. Thakur, *History of Mithilā*, p. 297.

24 R. N. Jha, *Maithila Brāhmaṇon Kī Pañjī-Vyavasthā*, p. 44; *Mithilā-Bhāratī*, vol. I, pts.-i-ii, 7ff. "शाके श्री हरिसिंहदेव नृपतेर्भूपार्क तुल्ये जनितस्मादन्तमितेऽब्दके द्वजनैः पञ्जीप्रबन्ध कृतः"

25 Varma, *op. cit.*, pp. 46-47.

told that Bhūpāla Harisiṁha entrusted the task of preparing the Kāyastha *pañji* to Śrī Shankara Dutta Mallik who compiled it with the active help and assistance of his nephew, Mantri Guṇapati.[26] It seems while Shankara Dutta was assigned the task of completing Kāyastha *pañji*, Harinātha Upādhyāya, with the active co-operation of Harisiṁhadeva and his minister Sūryakara Ṭhākura, completed the Brāhmaṇa *pañji* and ultimately laid the foundation of Maithila Kulinism.[27] Sūryakara Ṭhākura has been described as *lekhi* (writer or officer) in the *pañji-prabandha.*

From all available evidences it seems that the compilation of the *pañji* was effected a few years after the beginning of Harisiṁhadeva's reign (possibly in 1309–10 A. D.) which later came to be copied by different authorised pañjikāras from Śāke 1248 (= 1327 A. D.) to A. D. 1352 (= L. S. 233 as mentioned in one of the Kāyastha Pañjis, discovered by Varma)[28], when Harisiṁhadeva was no more on the scene. It took atleast fifteen years to collect and compile all the genealogical records kept by the individuals in the name of family-tree (*vaṁśa-vṛkṣa*) in different villages of Mithilā. After having collected the available records from individuals, on scrutiny it was found that all the details required for the purpose—eight generations from mother's side and eight from father's father—were not always available. However, whatever was collected was compared, collected, edited and compiled to make it a compact and scientific document for future guidance of the Maithilas in respect of marriage and other social matters with a view to saving them from further caste-pollution. These records are known as *mūla pañjis* (original *pañji*) which grew into huge complicated volumes of gigantic proportions, which were, for convenience sake, divided into different branches detailing the records of a particular gotra (*śākhā pañjis*) as offshoots of the original *pañji*, and were given their present shape by the famous pañjikāra (genealogist) Raghudeva Jhā, after the establishment of the Darbhanga Raj, under the Mahārājas of the Khaṇḍavāla dynasty. These *śākhā pañjis* are now studied and kept meti-

26 R. K. Choudhary, *Mithilā in the Age of Vidyāpati*, pp. 112-13.

27 Varma, *op. cit.*, p. 47.

28 For details see R. N. Jha, *op. cit.*, p. 44 ff; *Mithilā Bhārati*, vol. II, p. 111 ff.

culously by the pañjikāras for issuing *asvajana patra* (*siddhānta* or marriage certificate). Similarly we have the *patra-pañjī* (a portion of the original *pañjī*) which contains the names of the branches (*śākhās*) of every *mūla*. We have in it the names of the original families who inhabited a particular village at the time of the compilation of the *pañjī-prabandha* and whose branches or *śākhās* were determined accordingly. Unfortunately, however, like the original *pañjī*, a detailed study of the *patra-pañjī* has not been possible nor have all the villages mentioned in it been identified. It is therefore very difficult to say that in the *patra-pañjī* there is no mention of any village from outside Mithilā. Only a detailed scientific study of the place-names as recorded in the *patra-pañjī* would show that it contains the names of many places from outside the geographical boundary of Mithilā from where the Brāhmaṇas in early mediaeval and mediaeval periods had migrated to Mithilā and settled down there whose genealogical records were also collected along with others for the compilation of the *pañjī*. It should be remembered here that, except in early periods, no one before Śaka 1200 (1278 A. D.) called himself Maithila or Tairabhukta or Videha (inhabitant of Mithilā, Tīrabhukti or Videha), and there was no such nomenclature as Maithila Brāhmaṇa. Many Brāhmaṇas from other parts of the country had settled down in Mithilā to escape the fury of Muslim invasion and they, including the original Brāhmaṇa-inhabitants of the land were known as Brāhmaṇa. There was absolutely no distinction between the Maithilas and the non-Maithilas in those days. It was only after the consolidation of the *pañjī-prabandha* that all the Brāhmaṇas of Mithilā came to be known as Maithila Brāhmaṇa and Maithila Kāyastha to distinguish them from their counterparts in other parts of the country. On the other hand, many families of the Maithila Brāhmaṇas migrated to Bengal and other parts of the country, whose genealogical records could not find place in the celebrated *pañjī* for want of positive information and as such the *pañjī-prabandha*, inspite of its enormous size and inexplicable complicacy, can not be claimed to be a comprehensive document of the Maithila Brāhmaṇas for all practical purposes.[29]

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29 For details see Upendra Thakur, "Sanskrit Learning in Mithilā" in *JBRS* (Mahārājādhirāja Kameshwar Singh Vol.), pt. I, p. 98ff.

III

The Dūṣaṇa-pañjī :

After the composition of the *pañjī-prabandha* a separate register detailing the demerits (*doṣa or dūṣaṇa*) of a particular sub-caste, *mūla* or *gotra* was also prepared, known as *Dūṣaṇa-Pañjī*,, which was kept (and is kept even now) as a strictly secret document by the pañjīkāras. The authorised genealogists took a vow amongst themselves that this *pañjī* was not, in any case, to be shown to others than the pañjīkāras. Accordingly it was decided that only those could qualify for being genuine *pañjīkāras* who could copy atleast one whole book of the pañjī which often ran into six or seven hundred pages. The historicity of this *pañjī* is also substantiated by Kumārila's statement (noted above) when he says that the *Kulīnas* or *Mahākulīnas* (men of high noble birth) always took into consideration the demerits of a particular caste which usually found mention in the individual *samūhalekhya* of the period, at the time of negotiating marriages of their sons or daughters. Kumārila says the Brāhmaṇas and the Kṣatriyas used to examine the virtues and vices inherent in a particular family or *kula* while contracting marriages in order to protect their caste or, plainly speaking, their purity of blood (*tathā ca pratikulaṁ guṇadoṣasmaraṇ-ānadanurūpāḥ pravṛtti nivṛttayo dṛśyante*). The above two terms—*pravṛtti* and *nivṛtti*–in Kumārila's statement are significant as they point to the possibility of a marriage being negotiated with particular individuals. Where everything is in order, marriage can be settled (i. e., *pravṛtti*) and where there are doṣas (defects), a *kulīna* avoids *marriage* (*nivṛtti*). However, there was no fixed standard to determine the virtues and vices of a *kula*. It differed from man to man, family to family, *kula* to *kula*, caste to caste. All were not equal in the society. There was distinction between man and man and *kula* and *kula* according to *guṇa-doṣa*. High and low birth was measured in terms of virtues and vices, purity and impurity of blood or caste. This tradition was also in vogue in the time of Kumārila as is clear from his statement referred to above. Moreover, several hundred years before Kumārila, Manu, Yājñavalkya and others had also stressed upon this aspect of caste and prescribed penances for purification of blood.

Thus, from the above we can safely draw the following inferences:

(i) In the time of Kumārila and earlier, protection of caste was considered necessary for the protection of *Dharma;*

(ii) The Brāhmaṇas and the Kṣatriyas attached much importance to the protection of caste (purity of blood);

(iii) Marriage according to Śāstric injunctions was necessary for protection of caste, and illegal or unauthorised marriages (not in Śāstric consonance) were discouraged and denounced;

(iv) Details of the negotiating families must be examined to avoid *doṣa* before the actual marriage is settled. This is further confirmed by the following statement of King Janaka of Mithilā : *pradāne kulaṁ nirvaiṛpataḥ kulajātena vaktavyam.*

(v) As one could not remember all the details *(paricaya)* of ones family, it was considered necessary to maintain and preserve *samūhalekhya* which was consulted at the time of negotiating marriages;

(vi) The virtues and the vices of a *kula* must be thoroughly examined before settling a marriage. One should go in for marital relationship with a noble family and avoid any kind of relationship with a family which suffers from certain vices forbidden by the Śāstras;

(vii) Social power and position differed according to purity and impurity of caste; and

(viii) A man of pure caste or blood was known as *mahākulīna.*

A close study of the *pañji-prabandha* would show that the social values in the time of Kumārila were not at all different from those prescribed in the *pañji*. The only difference between the two is that while in the time of Kumārila, *samūha-lekhya* was preserved individually, in the fourteenth century in time of Harisiṁhadeva, it came to be elaborated, compiled and maintained under royal patronage and a set of trained persons (genealogists or *pañjikāras*) were assigned the task of keeping the records up-to-date. Even as far back as the age of the *Rāmāyaṇa* we find that the tradition of *samūha-lekhya* was followed meticulously, as on the occasion of Rāma's marriage, Vasiṣṭha is seen nar-

rating the family-tree of Rāma, while Janaka himself narrates that of Sītā (*Bālakāṇḍa* 78.2 : Janaka says : *pradāne hi muniśreṣṭha kulaṁ niravaśeṣataḥ : vaktavyaṁ kulajātena* etc.). The custom was faithfully followed by the *kulīnas* in the time of Kumārila and by the fourteenth century instead of remaining individual responsibility it became the responsibility of the State in Mithilā and elsewhere to maintain these genealogical records to guide the people along the right path. The issuing of marriage-certificate (*siddhānta* or *asvajana-patra*) was a safeguard against illegal or unauthorised marriages. After issuing marriage certificates, the genealogists (pañjīkāras) used to record the details of the marriage in the *pañjī* (genealogy). In other words, the marriage was officially registered (*pañjībaddha*). If a marriage was performed without obtaining *asvajana-patra* from the authorised genealogist, it was not included in the *pañjī*, and the off- springs of such marriages stood automatically excommunicated from the society and deprived of the rights due to a legitimate son. Only learned and widely respected persons came to be appointed as *pañjīkāra* by the king from whom they received regular payment for the maintenance of their family. The genealogists issued *asvajana-patra* without any fee, as the issuing of *asvajana-patra* was deemed a great social service for which it was the duty of the king to pay.

IV

The Birth of Kulīnism :

The institution of Kulīnism marks an important landmark in the social history of Mithilā and Bengal. Scholars sharply differ about the origin and growth of this system, but a close scrutiny of the relevant records bearing on Kulīnism would leave no doubt that the birth of Kulīnism in Mithilā was a natural corollary of the introduction of the *pañjī*, although it existed in some form or the other even during the time of Kumārila Bhaṭṭa and much earlier of which we have indirect references in Manu, Yājñavalkya, Gautama, etc. Kumārila's reference to *mahākulīna* in his *Tantravārttika* clearly suggests that the roots of this institution were already engrained in the Hindu society since early times (*viśiṣṭenaiva hi prayatnena mahākulīnaḥ parirakṣanti ātmānām*...), though it came to be fully developed in thirteenth-fourteenth centuries A. D. According

to him not only the Brāhmaṇas but the interested Kṣatriyas also took necessary precaution to maintain purity of their caste and blood, and kept their samūha lekhya (*anenaiva hi| hetunā Rājabhirbrāhmaṇaiśca svapitṛpitāmahādipāramparyāsmaraṇārtha samūha lekhyāni pravartitāni*) with missionary accuracy. Those who took measures to protect purity of their blood at any cost and in all circumstances, were, according to Kumārila, *mahākulina*. The term *mahākulina*, as used by Kumārila, was also popular in Bengal, Gujarata and Maharashtra. Assam also preserved this institution till a very late period. While stressing the purity of blood it gave prominence to birth, accomplishment and character which came to be the hall mark of a *kulina* in the society, and established new social values which zealously aimed at conserving the purity of blood and upholding the distinctive marks of culture.

D. C. Sircar, while editing the Bongaon copper plate of Nārāyaṇapāla, observed : "Another interesting fact revealed by the Bongaon plate is the great importance attached by the local Brāhmaṇas of north Bihar to their relation with a Brāhmaṇa of Kolāñcha,......One of the most renowned sects of the learned Brāhmaṇas. Equally interesting is the fact that the reverential attitude of the east Indian Brāhmaṇas towards the Brāhmaṇas of Kolāñcha, seems to have been an important factor in the growth of the peculiar social institution, known as *kulīnism* in north Bihar and Bengal."[30] This is further supported by the Panchobha copper plate of Saṁgrāmagupta[31] (12th century A. D.), discovered from Panchobha, a village in Darbhanga district, which also refers to the Kolāñcha Brāhmaṇa. It it popularly believed that a king, named Ādiśūra, invited a number of Brāhmaṇas from Kolāñcha, who were well-versed in the Vedas and other branches of Sanskrit literature. Vācaspati Miśra, the great thinker of Mithilā (9th century A. D.), has referred to a ruler Ādiśūra. According to D. C. Sircar, no genuine ruler named Ādiśūra is known from the Bengal sources who became famous in the legends regarding the settlement of the Kolāñcha Brāhmaṇas in Bengal. He further suggests that the institution of kulī-

30 *Epigraphia Indica*, vol. XXIX, pp. 52-54.
31 U. Thakur, *Some Aspects of Ancient Indian History & Culture*, pp. 29-34; R. K. Choudhary, *Select Inscription of Bihar*, Intro.

nism was borrowed from north Bihar or Mithilā,[32] the beginning of which may probably be seen in the tradition of the five Brāhmaṇas, invited from the sacred land of Kolāñcha.

It has been suggested that "the mythical hero Ādiśūra......who seems to have ruled in north-eastern portion of Mithilā laid the foundation of kulinism in his territory...from where it spread to Bengal and other parts. The Brāhmaṇas of Mithilā were already grouped according to their *gotra* and *pravara*, and after the system was organised on sound lines by Ādiśūra, the skelton genealogy came to be maintained.. as the earliest *pañji* goes back to the time of Nānyadeva."[33] The suggestion suffers from certain inherent contradictions :

(i) the historicity of Ādiśūra is completely shrouded in obscurity, and,

(ii) the tradition of *samūha-lekhya*, which later came to be compiled and consolidated as *pañji* was current as early as the time of Kumārila which came to be organised on sound lines in the time of Harisiṁhadeva in Mithilā and Ballālasena in Bengal.[34] Later Orissa and Assam also had their own system of kulinism, and all these states were culturally integrated for a greater period, where the *pañji* existed in one form or the other.

The suggestion that the great Vācaspati Miśra flourished in the court of the legendary King, Ādiśūra who ruled over certain parts of Mithilā stands unsupported by historical evidence. At the end of his *Bhāmatī* commentary Vācaspati simply says that he wrote this book when the great king Nṛga was reigning.[35] This king has not been historically traced and mystery still surrounds

32 D. C. Sircar, *EI*, XXIX, pp. 52-54; *Land Lordism and Tenancy in Ancient and Medieval India*, Lucknow, 1969, pp. 11-12.

33 R. K. Choudhary, *Mithilā in the Age of Vidyāpati*, p. 111; *P. U. Journal*, vol. I, No. 2 (1945), p. 11.

34 For a detailed study of Bengal *Kulinism* see Ronald B. Inden, *Marriage and Rank in Bengali Culture : A History of Caste and Class in Middle Period Bengal*, University of California Press, 1976; Thomas R. Trautmann's Review Article in Journal of Asian Studies, vol. XXXIX, No. 3, May 1980.

35 Cf. *Bhāmatī*, end Verse : "Nṛpāntarāṇāṁ......Śrīman Nṛge'kāri mayā. Nibandhaḥ" (Quoted, U. Thakur, *Some Aspects of Ancient Indian History and Culture*, chap. VI, p. 83ff).

his personality. Some scholars have tried to identify this (Nṛga) with Ādiśūra of Bengal "who is credited in all genealogical works of *Rāḍhīya* and Varendra Brāhmaṇas with having invited and settled their first ancestors within his dominions. But, all reliable evidences place this Ādiśūra of Bengal about 700 A. D., before the rise of the Pāla dynasty. It is much more probable that Ādiśūra, like Ādimalla is a honorific title, and not a proper name at all."[36] This suggestion seems self-contradictory in nature. Ādiśūra, like Nṛga, was a legendary king of Bengal who is said to have flourished about 700 A. D., i. e., more than a century earlier than Vācaspati. His time is based on pure assumption and he is, as noted above, credited with having invited five Brāhmaṇas to Bengal who were responsible for the birth of *kulīnism* in Bengal and Mithilā. As things stand, he can at last be treated as a mythical personality round whom numerous tales have been woven which are current in Bengal and elsewhere.[37] Vācaspati refers to him in his *Nyāyakaṇikā* but that is just by way of comparisons which make it perfectly clear that he had no connection with him whatever. Ādiśūra passed for a legendary figure and as such he was well known to Vācaspati and others in Mithilā. The suggestion that *Ādiśūra* was a honorific title which was apparently assumed by king Nṛga, belonging to the so-called extinct Śūra dynasty of Mithilā is all the more preposterous, for we have no evidence of such a dynasty that ever flourished in Mithilā, or in any other part of Bihar or Bengal either in ancient or mediaeval time.[38] Thus, the institution of kulīnism in Mithilā can not be traced by Ādiśūra : infact we have to go back to the time of Smṛtikāras, and particularly to Kumārila to trace its origin according to whom, protection of caste was like protection of one's soul and those who protected purity of their caste against all odd were *mahākulīnas*.[39]

The word *kulīna* was used in Mithilā in derivative (*yaugika*) sense, not in compound (*yogarūḍhi*) sense. In Bengal the *kulīnas* occupied the highest position in social gradation, and in Mithilā they were known as *soti* or *śrotriya*.

36 D. C. Bhattacharya, *History of Navya-Nyāya in Mithilā*, pp. 24-25.

37 R. C. Mazamdar (ed.), *History of Bengal*, vol. 1 (section on Ādiśūra).

38 U. Thakur, *op. cit*., pp. 90-91.

39 R. N. Jha, *Alayākula Prakāśa*, p. 151ff; *Mithilā Bhāratī*, vol. III, nos. 1-4, p. 2ff.

The reason was obvious. In Bengal while determining kulīnism, caste played the most predominant role : if a kulīna contracted relations with other than a *kulīna*, he lost his status in the society for ever. In other words, kulīnism in Bengal was chiefly determined on the basis of the purity of blood or birth. It is just possible that during the time of Kumārila, caste determined one's social status in the society or probably Kumārila laid stress on the protection of caste in order to protect one's *dharma*. In Mithilā, however, the so-called purity of blood and caste seems to have lost its ground when the *pañjī-prabandha* came to be compiled and edited. The Brāhmaṇas in Mithilā were divided into three categories on the basis of their daily *karma* (rituals and learning), for instance, Śrotriya, Yogya and Pañjībaddha. Those who were not included in this list or indulged in degrading acts came to be known as Jaibāras. Even all the members of the Śrotriya class were not treated equally pure : those who were adjudged best on the basis of purity of blood were known as *avadāta* (perfectly pure), and the number of such *avadāta* families among the Śrotriyas was so small as to be counted on fingers. In other words, purity of caste was not the only factor that determined their social status : on the other hand, academic pursuits, learning and integrity of character also played a major part in determining their status and also their caste-gradation in the society. Indeed, this was the most distinctive feature which put Maithila kulīnism on a different footing from that in Bengal and elsewhere.

First of all, it was in Bengal that society came to be reorganised in order to determine the highest status of the Brāhmaṇas which, in turn, accorded recognition to "Brāhmaṇic regionalism". It is believed in certain quarters that the re-organisation of society in the time of Harisiṁhadeva in Mithilā was done on the pattern of kulīnism prevalent in Bengal. This view, however, is erroneous. In Bengal there were no pure Brāhmaṇas (*sadbrāhmaṇa*), and hence five Brāhmaṇas belonging to five *gotras* were invited from Kānyakubja by Ballālasena for setting down in Bengal and they were given handsome property by the king. The off-springs of these Brāhmaṇas who protected purity of their blood in all circumstances came to be known as *kulīna*, and the rest lower in grade, were recognised as Śrotriya. In Mithilā, however, the condition was quite different. There was no dearth of pure Brāhmaṇas and the class-division, too,

had a different pattern. In Bengal kulīnism, utmost importance was attached to matrimonial alliances and a kulīna lost his status and respect in the society forever if he married a girl of a lower birth. Despite all penances he could never regain his status and had to pass the rest of his days in social stigma and as an 'outcaste'. In Mithilā, all the Brāhmaṇas were equally respected, provided their parents were married in accordance with Śāstric injunctions.

In Bengal kulīnism, one could lose one's caste and become degraded for-ever, and a man of lower birth could never achieve the distinction of being a *kulīna* inspite of his great and pious deeds. In Mithilā, however, one could rise and fall in social hierarchy according to one's meritorious religious deeds or impious works. The system of keeping *samūha-lekhya* or *kūlji* was also prevalent in Bengal, but in Mithilā it was preserved with minute details, and marriages were contracted strictly in accordance with Śāstric injunctions. It is interest-ing to note here that in Bengal only a few persons were given the status of kulīna whose off-springs also came to be respected as kulīnas on the basis of their birth, provided they did not degrade themselves by marrying a girl of a lower birth. In Mithilā, only the principle governing the classification of the Brāhmaṇas was determined; and accordingly, the Brāhmaṇas and the Kāyasthas were grouped into different classes on the basis of their meritorious acts and profession. It has been rightly suggested that no one was accorded the status of a Śrotriya or a Yogya at the time when the *pañjī-prabandha* came to be compiled and edited. It was only in (and after) the time of Rājā Rāghava Siṁha of the Khaṇḍavāla dynasty (Darbhanga Raj) that *Śrotriyaism* in Mithilā came to be systematised and classified as *kulīnism* on the pattern of Bengal, and the rules governing this class came to be framed and modified by King Rāghava Siṁha and his successors. It is true, the birth of *Śrotiyaism* can be traced to the time of Harisiṁhadeva, but the extra-ordinary shape through which it expressed itself in later times (after 1760 A. D.) was no-thing but a degraded and morbid form of its former self which was ultimately responsible for mutual hatred, dissensions and jealousy in the society. In the old system, only certain principles were laid down and one could attain to higher or highest gradation in the society through continuous meritorious deeds. In other words, one could achieve this distinction but not be made a *śrotriya*.

Thus in different parts of the country, the Brāhmaṇas grouped themselves into different classes to protect their caste which gradually gave birth to independent traditions and usages in those regions, and they in the course of time came to be known after the name of the region they inhabited. Of these, the Brāhmaṇas in the five regions to the north of the Vindhyas grouped, organised and classified themselves strictly in accordance with Śāstric injunctions and they were accorded the highest place in social hierarchy. These Brāhmaṇas later on came to be known after the name of their original habitat such as Sārasvata, Kānyakubja, Gauḍa, Maithila and Utkala.[40]

Risley,[41] following G. N. Dutt.[42] rightly believes that "the system of kulinism was borrowed some centuries ago by the Brāhmaṇas of Bengal from Mithilā." As we know, the Bengali *kula-pañjikā* texts are known :

(i) after some avowedly Maithila smṛti nibandha authorities on marriage, such as Hari Miśra, Vācaspati Miśra, etc.;

(ii) the earliest *kulaji* texts do not go before the latter half of the 15th century A. D., and even the genuineness of some early texts is doubtful;[43] whereas Maithila texts of the *pañji* are expressly dated in the early fourteenth century A. D.;

(iii) the system of keeping genealogical records among Kāyasthas of Assam is said to have been borrowed from Mithilā.[44] Kavīndrapatra, like hsi forefather who by introducing the system of keeping genealogical registers had kept an authorised record of the status of the Kāyasthas of Mithilā, brought fourteen Kāyastha families from Mithilā, and reconstructed on lines similar to those of his predecessor, the Kāyastha community of Kāmarūpa. As in Mithilā, so in Kāmarūpa the *Dāsas* are regarded as *kulīnas*, and then came the *Devas* and *Dattas* in point of honour in social hierarchy. This order obtains even now among the Kāyasthas of Kāmarūpa Though these names

40 R. N. Jha, *Mithilā-Bhārati*, pp. 110–11.

41 *The People of India*, p. 215.

42 *The Kāyasthas and Brāhmaṇas of Bengal*, 1906.

43 R. C. Majumdar, *history of Bengal*, vol. I, pp. 624–25.

44 N. N. Basu, *Social history of Kāmarūpa*, vol. II, p. 168.

(of the Kāyastha families brought to Kāmarūpa) usually run counter to the names recorded in the Kāyastha *Pañjī* of Mithilā, there is no doubt that the above account makes it likely that Mithilā was the original home of kulīnism. We are further told that some of the Brāhmaṇas from Mithilā migrated to Assam as early as sixth century A. D.[45] Having been annoyed at the predominance of the Buddhists in Mithilā, they are said to have migrated to Purnea and Assam. The Vaidika *Sampradāyikas* were the earliest Brāhmaṇa settlers of Assam from Mithilā. They still follow the Smṛti rites of Mithilā school in preference to Bengal school. From traditional accounts we learn that five Vaidika Brāhmaṇas from Mithilā were invited by a king of Tripurā to assist him in the performance of a *yajña*.[46] These Brāhmaṇas kept alive the arthodox tradition of castes and claimed themeselves to be free from Buddhist influences. The Nāgara Brāmaṇas of Assam are said to have been a section of the Mithilā Brāhmaṇas.[47] And, finally,

(iv) according to some scholars,[48] though Harisiṁha re-organised society, the *pañjīs* were known at the time of Nānyadeva (c. 1096 A. D.). This date is decidedly much earlier than the legendary ascription of the Bengal *pañjīs* to the reign of Ballālasena (c. 1158-1180).

In this connection it may be pointed out that the text on which Bengali tradition makes Ballālasena call persons as *kulīna* was composed by Vācaspati Misra II who flourished in about fifteenth century A. D. It is not known when exactly kulīnism went to Bengal, but from what we know of the relations between Bengal and Mithilā during 14th–15th centuries, it is possible that it went there when Bengali scholars used to haunt Maithila *catuṣpāṭhīs* as students of Nyāya, Mīmāṁsā and Smṛti-Nibandha-Dharmaśāstras.[49] But, the

45 *EI*, XIX, pp. 117–24; II, p. 330; XXI, p. 219; *Vanger Jātiya Itihāsa*, p. 95; N. N. Basu, *op. cit.*, Vol. I, p. 117.

46 N. N. Basu, *op. cit.*, III, p. 63; *E. I.*, XII, p. 65ff; *I. H. Q.*, VII, p. 743; R. K. Choudhary, *Mithilā in the Age of Vidyāpati*, p. 110.

47 For a detailed account see Basu, N. N. *op. cit.*, III, p. 81ff.

48 *Patna University Journal*, vol. I, no. 2 (1945), p. 11; *Bihar Through the Ages* (ed. R. R. Diwakar), p. 424.

49 *JBORS*, 1947, Vol. XXXIII, p. 56.

most remarkable aspect of kulīnism in Bengal is that it existed there in exactly the same form as envisaged by Kumārila in his *Tantravārttika*. Infact, the *mahākulīna* of Kumārila was not different either in form, substance or usage from the *kulīna* of Bengal, which influenced considerably the social life in Gujarat, Maharashtra, Assam, Orissa and other parts of India in later years.

As the Maithila society was re-organised during the time of Harisiṁha in the light of the age-old *samūha lekhya*, he is popularly credited with having laid the foundation of *Maithila kulīnism* with the help of his minister, Sūryakara Ṭhākura, known as *lekhī* (an officer) in the Maithila *pañjī*.[50] Infact, in Mithilā it was the birth, accomplishment and character that ultimately decided the issue of one's social status or kulīnism.[51] The custom of recording genealogical accounts and measures to preserve them was enforced and the task of keeping the records of the Brāhmaṇa and Kāyastha (Karaṇa or Karṇa) families of Mithilā was entrusted to learned Brāhmaṇas and Kāyasthas who came to be subsequently honoured and respected in the society as *pañjīkāras*. Of the various names that made immense contribution to the systematization of kulīnism in Mithilā, those of Raghudeva Jhā and Sūryakara Ṭhākura will go down in the social history of Mithilā for the superb role they played in reorganising the society. The system became so deep-rooted in course of time that the social hierarchy with its carefully regulated gradations of honour apportioned to each family exists even today among the Brāhmaṇas and the Kṣatriyas of Mithilā. Like the *Śrotriya* and *Yogyas* in the Brāhmaṇa social hierarchy, the two *mūlas–Balain* (Saptā Ḍerā) and *Biarasaṅ* (Kharājapura Ḍerā) are still held in high esteem among the Kāyasthas (Karaṇa) of Mithilā. A long list of the graded social hierarchy of the Mithilā Brāhmaṇas according to *gotra*, *pravara* and *mūla* has been furnished by Ghanānanda Jhā.[52] Among the Kāyasthas these are classed as *Jaibāra-mūlas*. There was third section also, generally

50 N. N. Basu, *op. cit.*, vol. II, p. 158ff.

51 R. N. Jha, *Harihara-Sūktimuktāvalī*, p. 32; *Mithilā Mihira (Mithilāṅka)* 1936, pp. 69, 111.

52 For a detailed account see, R. N. Jha, *Alaṅkulaprakāśa*; G. N. Jha, *Ghaṭakarāja*; Das, *Mithilā-Darpaṇa*; P. Jhā, *Mithilā-tattva-vimarśa* etc; R. K. Choudhary, *op. cit.*, pp. 114–16.

classed as *bhalamānusas* and *gṛhasthas*.[53] Besides the Brāhmaṇas and the Kāya-sthas, the Vaiśyas had also their own *pañjī*, and some such Vaiśyas are still living near Rahariyā, a railway station in Saharasā.[54] Their *asvajanapatras* (certificates of marriage) are written on the *marvā* or *maṇḍapa* at the time of marriage. Later the Kṣatriyas or Rājapūtas of Mithilā also borrowed this system.[55] The *Gopas* (Gwālās) are also believed to have adopted it during the time of Hari-siṁhadeva.[56]

From Jyotirīśvara to Vidyāpati—all the great writers and thinkers of Mithilā seem to have been ardent champions of the system of kulīnism. A close study of *vivāha-varṇana* (description of marriage) section of the *Varṇa-Ratnākara* would suggest that genealogical *pañjīs* were highly valued and respected.[57] Jyotirīśvara describes himself as *Pallījanma bhūminā* (botn in Pallī or Pāli village). Vidyāpati, too, was a great supporter of kulīnism, and his strong views about the rigidity of social system can be seen from his poems and other works. He advocated marriages in strict accordance with Śāstric injuctions (*pañjī-vyavasthā*) and laid much stress on purity of blood and caste, *jāti* and *ajāti*.[58] According to him *akulīna* (non-kulīna) deserves no sympathy and even beauty was the preserve of the rich and privileged class. Caste was the determining factor in social life, and a man born of infamous lineage is bound to turn out an evil-minded snake,[59] and a country where caste-rules are not observed, is a *mleccha deśa*[60] (the land of untouchables).

53 *Ghaṭaka rāja*, pp. 18–23.
54 R. K. Choudhary, *op. cit.*, p. 115.
55 Ghanānanda Jhā, *Ghaṭakarāja*, pp. 44–46; *Mithilā Darpaṇa*, pp. 45–47.
56 *Ibid.*, p. 47.
57 Jyotirīśvara, *Varṇa-Ratnākara*, pp. 63–64.
58 Vidyāpati, *Kīrttilatā*, p. 16 : "Jāti ajāti ka vivāha adhama uttama kāā pāraka" (जाति अजातिक बिवाह अधम उत्तम कएँ पारक);
Padāvalī, No. 458 : "अकुलिन सयँ यदि कर सद्भाव";
No. 459 : "कबहु न होमए जाति व्यभिचार"
Also cf. *Puruṣa Parīkṣā-Katha*, 6; S. N. Thakur, *Vidyāpati Viśuddha Padāvalī*, nos. 4, 40, 43.
59 *Puruṣa-Parīkṣā Kathā*, 13.
60 *Dānavākyāvalī*, pp. 10–11.

The system of kulinism had a wide appeal in the beginning and the most peculiar aspect of these *pañjīs* is that they do not generally record the name of women, though in some of the Brāhmaṇa *pañjīs*, the names of daughters are recorded not in the families of their birth, but in those of their marriages. As Mahārājādhirāja of Darbhanga later came to be recognised as the religious head of Mithilā, he was called *Mithileśa* and he could make any Brāhmaṇa Śrotriya by virtue of the authority vested in him. As regards the present grouping, we can not be very certain about it. The *pañjīs* in the beginning simply served as a guide line to be followed, but later many complications crept in and the whole thing became awfully enormous in size and content, rendering it unmanageable. The original *pañjīs* are now hardly available, and some of the manuscripts in the possession of the pañjīkāras are so technically written and compiled that for a lay man they are literally a sealed book.

V

Impact on the Society :

This new social organisation constitutes a land-mark in the history of Mithilā. Introduced some six hundred years ago, it dominates the social life of the people with all its damaging effects and implications. We have been accused of ignorance and lack of understanding by some scholars of Mithilā[61] for having pointed out the baneful effects of this social measure on the Maithila society as a whole.[62] They claim that "it was primarity a measure of social re-organisation designed to conserve the purity of the Maithila race and to uphold the distinctive characteristics of Maithila culture, but it set up such new standards of social values that in effect it revolutionised the entire outlook of society and shaped the future destiny of Mithilā in such a manner and to such an extent that even the twentieth century is not free from its influences...... The measure got so stabilised that it has weathered in course of six hundred years and more, all the storms that have blown over Mithilā without its root being shaken, much less uprooted."[63] Further, "the *pañjī-prabandha* is one of the most

61 R. N. Jhā, *Mithilā-Bhāratī*, 1972, no. 3, pts I-IV), p. 2ff.
62 U. Thakur, *History of Mithilā*, pp. 362–66.
63 *Sūktimuktāvalī* of Harihar (ed. R. N. Jha), Intro. 30

important forces in Maithila life...... A sympathetic appreciation of the old custom, which has in the past played an important part in preserving social order and encouraged a healthy rivalry for virtuous and noble life, should, however, prevent us from morally condemning it blindly."[64] The advocates of this social reform further argue that those who believe that the *pañji* system created a sense of high and low among the Maithila Brāhmaṇas and split up them into so many sub-castes, suffer from prejudices and ignorance. According to them, the distinction between high and low birth was recognised also in the society in early days on the basis of purity of blood as is clear from the writings of the Smṛtikāras as well as Kumārila.[65] The actions of a man determine his place—high or low—in the society. The *pañji* does not discriminate between a Brāhmaṇa and a Brāhmaṇa, provided the marriage of his or her parents was performed within the forbidden degrees of relationship, and in consonance with Śāstric injunctions. Infact, the objective behind the consolidation of the *pañji* was to encourage the "sense of unity and Maithilahood "among the Brāhmaṇas and Kāyasthas of Mithilā.[66] The highest in the society contracted marriage with the lowest (provided he was of pure caste) in early days and there was absolutely no discrimination between a Brāhmaṇa and a Brāhmaṇa. The situation changed radically when no other consideration except birth in the so-called high *kula* came to be the only determining factor of one's place in social hierarchy.

Pāṇini defines a true Brāhmaṇa in the following words : "Trīṇi Yasyāvadātādi vidyā yoniśca karma ca. Etacchive vijānīyād Brāhmaṇasyāgra lakṣaṇaṁ." Mm. Gajādhara also says in his commentary on the *Mālatī Mādhava* : "Janmanā brāhmaṇojñeyaḥ saṁsakārād dvija uchyate, vidyayā yāti vipratvaṁ tribhiḥ Śrotriya ucyates"[67] (one is Brāhmaṇa by birth, *dvija* by proper saṁskāra, *vipra* by learning, and a *Śrotriya* is one who combines in him all the three virtues). In other words, learning and character, besides purity of caste, were

64 J. K. Mishra, *A History of Maithila Literature*, vol. I, p. 31.,

65 R. N. Jha, *Mithilā-Bhāratī*, no. 3, pts. I-IV, 1972, p. 10ff; no. 2 (1970). p. 109ff; No. 1 pts. i-ii, 1969, pp. 7, 10-11.

66 R. N. Jha, *op. cit*., No. 1 (pts. i-ii), p. 11.

67 Quoted *Ibid*., p. 11.

the chief determining factors of a Brāhmaṇa's place in the society. As we know, social values go on changing with the passage of time and that which was deemed moral in early days came to be considered as immoral in later periods. We should not blame Harisiṁhadeva for the bad effects, the *pañji* had on the society as his motive in bringing about his social reform was pure and honest. It is interesting to note here that even in France, a few years before the French Revolution in 1789 A. D., the nobles had demanded the appointment of official genealogists to examine the purity of the nobles (*kulīna*) to avoid confusion.[68] The most remarkable thing about this system is that it did not effect only the Brāhmaṇas residing in Mithilā but all those who had migrated and settled down here due to Muslim invasion. In other words, there was no "Maithila" Brāhmaṇa in Mithilā prior to the consolidation of the *pañji* : they were simply Brāhmaṇas who came to be known as 'Maithila Brāhmaṇa' only after the *pañji* system was fully enforced with the reult that regional distinctions gradually disappeared in Mithilā.

It is true that the propounders of this outstanding social reform had an honest and sincere motive—for instance, preserving social order and encouraging virtuous and noble life—behind their zeal, but the measure in course of centuries fell into disuse, and instead of proving a boon it spelt severe curses on the society causing devastating impact on the moral of the people. The so-called reconstitution of the society instead of bringing them together to unite, split them up into so many warring camps, each section trying to beat down the other, whenever such opportunity presented of itself. This new measure was solely responsible for the birth of various evils in the society–such as the monster of *bikauās*, the *kulīnas*, the *ghaṭakas* etc.–that soon crept in, and began to eat into the very vitals of the society which was gradually turned into a mess of crude monstrosities.[69] How far it "revolutionised the entire outlook of the society and shaped the future destiny of Mithilā" we do not know; how far it conserved "the purity of Mithilā race" is also doubtful and what "tremendous fillip" the "ideals" received is just not known, but there is no doubt that it

68 R. N. Jha, *op. cit.*, p. 12, fn.

69 Thakur, *History of Mithilā*, chap. VII.

has "weathered in course of six hundred years and more all the storms" and therein lies the success of this so-called social revolution.

Any reform, be it social or political, is deemed to be successful only when it brings in its wake all that is good, all that is life-giving to the society as a whole. A reform, howsoever, well-intentioned, has demoralising and degenerating effects if it benefits only a small section of the society. Great and stabilising reforms have always come from the bottom : they never come from the top. Reforms, when imposed, become an object of resistance and hatred, and defeat the very object of its creation. This was exactly the case with the social reforms introduced by Harisiṁhadeva in Mithilā (1310–11 A. D.) when the *pañjī* was compiled and edited by Maithila scholars by his order.

Some scholars have acclaimed the *pañjī* as a "crowning act"[70] of the age which was, and has been, never excelled before or after. What is surprising is that unable to shake off their own deep-rooted prejudices they outright dismiss others' views as a product of ignorance and bias[71] and claim that whatever Harisiṁha ordained is to be explicitly followed from birth to death without raising doubts. To them it is a divine documents like the ancient and mediaeval divine right theory of kingship, a law unto itself, which is to be obeyed, not to be questioned. But, from a close and impartial study of the *pañjī* it is clear that it was a reactionary measure introduced by the feudal lord of the feudal State which badly retarded the growth of the society although it tremendously benefitted a tiny section that now champions its cause. It had no doubt some intrinsic values in as much as it faithfully preserved the genealogical lists of the Maithila Brāhmaṇas and Kāyasthas which may be studied with great benefit as a source of the social history of Mithilā as we shall show in the following pages. On the whole it encouraged fissiparous tendencies which proved quite detrimental to the larger interest of the society as a whole.

As noted earlier, the system, since its inception, was followed with strict accuracy and, in its early phase, there was enough scope for every one to improve his social status by contracting matrimonial relationship with the upper

70 R. N. Jha, *Saduktimuktāvali* (Ed.), Intro. p. 29.

71 *Ibid.*, p. 29; *Mithilā Bhārati*, no. 3 (1972), p. 2ff.

class *mūlas* (known as *pātas* in colloquial terminology). The *kuladharma* and *kulīna* aspects of the society have been much emphasised by paṇḍita Hari Miśra and Vācaspati Miśra II, and those who failed to establish matrimonial alliances with persons of equal status (*mūlas*) for three generations were supposed to be downgraded either in maternal or paternal side and were treated as a *gṛhastha* (i. e., fallen from the original track). On the other hand, the status of a man came to be automatically upgraded in the society if he succeeded in establishing matrimonial relations with persons of upper class *mūlas*. This system was known as *vyavāstha* which involved a set price to be paid for either coming down or going up in the inverse ratio or even *vice-versa*.[72] In other words, those who acquired wealth could also upgrade their status in the society in matters of *mūla* and *jāti* through barter in the feudal society where money determined one's purity of caste and relative gradation in the social hierarchy. The poor were the silent spectators and worst victims of the rigidities of the *pañji* regulations.

The system further introduced the system of *mūla* in Mithilā. As the name suggests, *mūla* indicated either the original homeland or the territorial unit of the *Bījīpuruṣa*. In Mithilā, except the Brāhmaṇas no one had any specific *gotra* at the time : other castes adopted the *gotras* either of their family-priests or the *gotras* were thrust upon them to bring them under the Brāhmaṇical scheme of things.[73] Very often we find the territorial names for the exogamus sections awfully mixed up with the names preserving the memory of a chief who happened to found that particular section in historic times. Thus, *kula* and *mūla* express a circle of agnatic descent, and no one was allowed to marry a girl of his own *mūla*[74]. According to Risley, wherever exogamy based on *mūla* conflicted with that based on *gotra*, the *mūla* prevailed over the *gotra*[75]. As all the Karaṇa Kāyasthas of Mithilā belong to the same *gotra* (Kāśyapa gotra), they are strictly prohibited in contracting *samūla* marriages. We have already pointed out that with the introduction of the *pañji* system marriages

72 R. K. Choudhary, *op. cit.*, p. 116.

73 R. K. Choudhary, *op. cit.*, p. 117.

74 *Ibid.*

75 Risley, *op. cit.*, p. Lii-LXiii.

came to be performed strictly within the forbidden degrees of relationship and it was now obligatory for every person to get a certificate of non-relation-ship (*asvajanapatra*) between the two intending parties from the pañjīkāras.

This new reform was affected by Harisiṁhadeva with a view to saving the Maithila society from being polluted by foreigners, who were already knocking at the doors of Mithilā. It had its good points which we have elaborately discussed above, but then a time came when it was degraded to a point of no return. The defenders of the faith gradually turned the worst exploiters, and their pleasure or displeasure could account for the elevation or degradation of any one as they were both the temporal and spiritual heads of the society. Purely scriptural arguments now came to be advanced for maintaining this social inequality. The earlier flexibility of kulīnism having completely disappeared, exaggerated importance came to be attached to a person born in a high *kula (mūla)*, which ultimately created new complications in the society :

(i) A rigid religious basis this new measure struck at the very root of the society, disintegrated it to the core, fostered bitter jealousy and hatred amongst the newly constituted sub-castes within a caste and virtually turned it into so many warring groups.[76]

(ii) Marriages must now be arranged between the members of the same sub-caste or else they must face excommunication, sometimes disinheritance too, by the members of their own sub-caste.[77]

(iii) The higher in grade was naturally supposed to recover money from the other lower in grade. In other words, the matrimonial alliances, in course of time, turned into monetary alliances.[78]

(iv) As discussed in the preceeding pages these rules led to the birth of a new institution of pañjīkāras (genealogists) and a new class of *ghaṭakas* (marriage-contractors or go-betweens) which grew out of this very peculiarity in Maithila society. They were thoroughly unscrupulous and indulged in un-

76 Thakur, *op. cit.*, p. 363.

77 *Ibid.*

78 *Ibid.*, pp. 363–64.

fair means. As the keeping of the family genealogies (*pañjīs*) assumed gigantic proportions, the influence of the pañjīkāras increased immensely and they too, like the *ghaṭakas* indulged in extorting money from the poor people before issuing marriage-certificate (*asvajanapatra*). In course of time they turned professionals and the pañjīkāras became hereditary irrespective of their learning and efficiency.[79]

(v) Besides the classes of the *ghaṭakas* and the *pañjīkāras* it gave rise to a now system of contracting marriage, i. e., the *sabhāgāchī* marriage, which was yet another peculiar but important aspect of Maithila social life having no parallel elsewhere. The institution of *sabhāgāchī* at the Saurāṭha village got great impetus during the mediaeval period. It is situated to the east of the famous Mādhaveśvara Śiva temple at Saurāṭha, about four miles west of Madhubani where Maithila Brāhmaṇas from all over the country assemble in thousands once in a year to negotiate marriages of their sons and daughters. Formerly, the *sabhā* used to be held during the śuddha (sacred days) at different centres such as the villages Saurāṭha, Partāpur, Sajhuār, Bhakhrāil, Sahasaula, Bangāon and Govindaptr-Harrāhī of the old Darbhanga, Muzaffarpur, Bhagalpur and Purnea districts respectively where thousands of Maithila Brāhmaṇs flocked for marriage-negotiations. As a matter of fact, even for centuries after the enforcement of the marriage-rules of King Harisimhadeva, the negotiation and settlement of the marriage of all the four class of the Maithila Brāhmaṇas took place at their homes. The *sabhā-gāchīs*, i.e., the fixed places of the sabhās, are of comparatively recent growth. The *sabhā-gāchī* of village Saurāṭha is the oldest of all the sabhāgāchīs and is about the centre of Mithilā.[80] In and about this village lived and taught eminent paṇḍitas who were also authorities in genealogical matters. It was natural therefore that the *sabhā-gāchī* at Saurāṭha was selected first as the best place for the Maithilas to assemble and consult the genealogical records, negotiate and settle the marriage after examining the intended bridegroom in *Śāstras* at an open place under the trees which was considered suitable for administration

79 Thakur, *op. cit.*, pp. 363-64.

80 *JBORS*, Vol. III, p.512.

of justice in good old days.[81] It was thus a big social gathering which gave impetus to the institutions of the *ghaṭakas* and the *pañjīkāras*. These institution have now unfortunately lost their past sacred character and have become objects of ridicule among the more progressive sections of the society.

(vi) A new ferocious monster *bikauā* was born. The Maithila scholars style them as *kulīnas* or *bhalamānusas*.[82] But as Risley calls them, they were *bikauās* (a term widely current in Mithilā) meaning the "vendors" who married sometimes as many as forty to fifty wives.[83] Formerly, the classification of the kulīnas was based on the sole merit of religious observances, but, later, owing to exaggerated importance placed on the value of being born in a "high *kula*" they gave up all their sacred practices and adopted marriage as profession instead. Side by side with child-marriage, truimphant *kulīnism* and dowry system caused havoc in the society during the period under review. *Kulīnism* in this age (16th–19th) proved monstrous and produced shocking abuses, as poligamy became a regular habit with these so-called *kulīnas* or *bhalamānusas* who demanded a substantial dowry in every marriage as a matter of right. They had now turned the age-old sacred institution of marriage into a despicable profession. The question of sincere attachment on their part was simply talked out: money and more money was now the only demand of these frivolous, unmatched, illiterate and uncouth husbands. Poor and helpless girls remained mostly in their parents' houses where their husbands came once in two or three years only to exhort their dues from their fathers-in-law who wanted to raise their social status by giving their daughters in marriage to these *bikauas*, who though poor, disabled, illiterate and stupid were yet the *kulīnas* of the society whereas those of the lower grade were held in low estimation and contempt inspite of their learning and wit. The result was obvious. Growing demoralisation and hatred of one section against another infested the very soul of the society.

(vii) Early marriage or child-marriage got a great impetus and became the order of the day. Girls were married before the age of puberty and had

81 *JBORS*, vol. III, p. 542.

82 J. K. Mishra, *op. cit.*, vol. I, pp. 30–31.

83 Risley, *The People of India*, p. 215.

no say in the choice of their husbands. They had no liberty to protest, in words and deeds, against the inexorable laws of the society, and, "with conscience and feelings deeply wounded, they would only weep and occasionally murmur among themselves."[84] The institution of the child-marriage was so deep-rooted that it could not be abolished inspite of various legislations. Scrafton's observations[85] about Bengal hold partially good even today in case of Mithilā.

Though early marriage was generally the rule, yet in the case of a kulīna's daughter, the rule was very often violated. Her parents were bound to wait till they could collect sufficient money for their daughters' dowry. Sometimes from financial considerations, a girl of eleven or twelve was handed over as wife to a grey-haired *bikavā*. This dowry system was, however, not compulsory and never so shocking among the fortunate non-kulīnas. Sometimes among the latter the practice was just the opposite, because the bridegroom had to pay a dowry to the bridge.

The number of widows grew staggeringly awful. The death of one *kulīna* or *bhalamānusa* naturally caused the widowhood of atleast twenty to thirty women and even more.[86] The corrupt and degraded *kulīnas* were till recently highly honoured in the society because of their birth in the so-called high *kula*, though they generally happened to be illiterate and foolish. The position of the helpless widows in the society was deplorable and at certain places it came to be regarded as inauspicious to have a look at their face. They were an object of hatred, never to be respected by the society. The result was that the ill-fated girls were reduced to a band of despised creatures worse than the slaves. Though in Bengal and elsewhere, as a result of strong movements by great social reformers, widows were given legal rights to marry and their issues legal rights to inherit property, Mithilā, the land of excessive orthodoxy, completely ruled out any such reform and remained unaffected by these changes and movements.

84 Thakur, *op. cit.*, p. 364.

85 Scrafton, *Reflections on the Government of Indostan*, pp. 10–11.

86 In certain provinces girls to the number of a hundred or two were married to one man (R. G. Bhandarkar, *Collected Works*, II, pp. 468–70).

Thus, the condition of women in general became worse. Daughters could easily be sold away by their parents for a few coins. The fifteenth century nodoubt produced celebrated women-scholars like Lakhimā, Dhīramati, Viśvāsadevī and Chandrakalā (Vidyāpati's daughter-in-law), but the following periods proved quite dismal[87]. They were now virtual prisoners in their own homes. Education to them began to be regarded by the society as a thing of ridicule and contempt. The glorious tradition of Maitreyī, Gārgī, Lakhimā and others was given a go by and thrown ignonimously to the widows.

(vii) The system of kulīnism helped grow the conservative outlook of the Brāhmaṇas in general and retarded their social progress to such an extent that Mithilā has not been able to free herself from its sordid influences. Without any prospect of political progress, the Maithila mind was diverted towards the purity of race and culture and the system, in question, afforded good food for their intellectual diversions[88]. The most damaging impact of kulīnism on the society was that it killed the initiative of a large number of people who were more interested in the development of their own section, than in the development of the society as a whole. It led to excessive orthodoxy and empty formalism. Distinctions created barriers and violation of new social rules led to social ostracism with the result that the newly created classes put more premium on their so-called purity of blood than anything else.

Relation between different castes and various other groups now come to be governed by the rules of endogamy. "Acceptance of cooked food from other caste groups was interdicted and pursuit of hereditary profession was insisted".[89] Formerly different castes lived togethet but now things had come to such a pass that this practice came to be strongly discouraged by the society. Weath was the only determining factor of one's social status and prestige : it determined the wisdom of a man[90], and with its disappearance vanished also the good

87 U. Thakur, *History of Mithilā*, pp. 364–65.
88 R. K. Choudhary, *op. cit.* ,p. 118.
89 *Ibid.*, p. 123; Also see Varma, *op. cit.*, pp. 36–37.
90 Mitra-Majumdar, *Vidyāpati*, verse no. 494 : "वैभव गेला रहत विवेक, हीनत दुरब लाबे भार एक"

qualities of a human being.[91] In other words, in the Maithila society of the period under review only two things counted—purity of caste and wealth, the cheif characteristics of a feudal set up.

VI

Importance of the Pañji-Prabandha :

The *pañjis* are encyclopaedic in character and form the main basis of socio-economic history of Mithilā during the early-mediaeval and mediaeval periods. A critical and scientific study of the *pañjis* will reveal important information relating to the history of Mithilā. According to Grierson, the *pañji* records are one of the most extraordinary series in existence.[92] The *pañji* literature, enormous in size and content, is terribly intricate and complicated. The language used is awfully technical and the style so difficult, and at places inexplicable, that it is not easy for a man, not well versed in *pañji* terminology, to make out any purposeful meaning. As we have noted above, in the beginning it was written or compiled by one or two scholars but later a group of scholars kept on adding new records to the original compilations, as and when they were found. Thus, this literature gradually grew in size and now it is a huge voluminous document which only a set of dedicated scholars can handle effectively to glean the following information bearing on the history of Mithilā :

(i) A comprehensive history of the Brāhmaṇas who later came to be christened as "Maithila" Brāhmaṇa;

(ii) The rise and decline of the social order which in turn brought about changes in the society and affected tremendously the existing moral values.

(iii) A comprehensive history of the different dynasties of the Maithila Brāhmaṇa kings : who ruled over different parts of Mithilā such as Oinavāra, Khaṇḍavāla, Suragaṇa (Saurīā), Pavaulibāra (Phaḍakiā), Alaibāra (Banaili-Śrīnagara), Karamahaya (Rajaura) etc.

91 Mitra-Majumdar, *Vidyāpati*, verse no. 461 : "वैभव गेला [illegible] भाल
भाग्य पराभव धरे [illegible]"

92 *Indian Antiquary*, 1885 (July), p. 187.

(iv) A comprehensive history of the celebrated Maithila scholars, law-givers and thinkers such as Kālidāsa, Miśra, Kumārila, Maṇḍana, Vācaspati etc. who have contributed to the enrichment of Indian culture in general, and that of Mithilā in particular, on the basis of their genealogies preserved in the *pañjī* records. With the help of these records we can safely determine their time and achievements in different fields. This history will cover events of atleast one thousand years in the history of Mithilā.

(v) A social history of Mithilā or north-eastern India on the basis of a critical study of the genealogies and also a scientific analysis of their surnames. The *pañjī* literature is a veritable mine of information bearing on the social history of Mithilā. A close study would reveal the various trends and forces at work that ultimately shaped and governed the destiny of the people throughout the centuries.

(iv) Some important facets of economic history of the period can also be gleaned from the *pañjī* literature. With the march of truimphant *kulinism* and dowry system the age-old social values received a rude setback and expressed themselves through extra-ordinary shapes. How the erstwhile 'ayāchīs' of Mithilā now followed zealously the pursuits of acquiring wealth for having a respectable social standing, is one of the most interesting chapters of this history. The age old ideal of perfection among the Maithila Brāhmaṇas, symbolised by MM. Bhavanāth Miśra or Ayāchī Miśra was now forgotten : instead most of the high class paṇḍitas and Brāhmaṇas had developed insatiable lust for material prosperity. How to use riches in a right way has been elaborately discussed by Harihara in his *Sūktimuktāvalī* wherein he has cited the example of Vateśvara, the maternal grand-father of Ayāchī and "one of the highest among the Maithila Brāhmaṇas who was renowned not only for his learning but riches also."[93] Infact, the Brāhmaṇas of Mithilā had monopolised both intellect and wealth during this period.

Of the six professions for a Brāhmaṇa, *dāna* or gift became very popular in post-Harisiṁhadeva Mithilā as *yajña* had been in pre-Buddhist India. Nu-

93 *Sūktimuktāvalī*, XII. 25, Intro. 32.

merous treatises dealing with this subject clearly suggest that *dāna* was the main source of income of all the Brāhmaṇas and "the only means of acquiring riches for the more conscientious and orthodox among them."[94] This attraction of acquiring wealth through *dāna* served as a great impetus to the moving bands of scholars. The growing socio-economic problem of keeping body and soul together forced the unwilling scholars to move out in search of new patrons. In course of time it became a practice with the Maithila paṇḍitas to move about atleast once in a year and return home with riches sufficient to leave them free to devote themselves to the cultivation of learning throughout the year.[95]

There was also another class of paṇḍitas who were not satisfied with whatever they got to sustain themselves. They wanted more riches, and this lust for wealth made them stay out longer and go farther in search of liberal patrons who could satisfy their high ambitions. Endowed with sparkling brilliance and wit, erudite learning and versatility these shining bands of scholars commanded respect wherever they happened to go. Riches flowed into their coffers like water. Princes and chieftains accorded them unique distinction. Thus, laden with immense riches and unique honour most of these scholars came back home and received enough wealth to last them through their lives. Besides, they also received grants of lands which their descendands still enjoy. But, some of these scholars left their homes for good and settled down permanently in those far-off regions. In other words, these Maithila Brāhmaṇas established their "colonies" (if we may be permitted to use the term vaguely) all over India. Their descendants are still found in Bengal, Assam, Madhya Pradesh, Rajputana, Kashmir, Uttara Pradesh, Nepal and many other places.[96] "If a history of these colonies is compiled, it will be found that each one of them was founded by some adventurous and ambitious paṇḍita who could please some prince and thus receive from him a lavish gift, perhaps the very *guruship* of the royal family, content with which he gave up

94 *Ibid.*, Intro. 33.

95 U. Thakur, "Sanskrit Learning in Mithilā under the Khaṇḍavāla Dynasty", *JBRS*, Mahārājā Kāmeshwar Singh Com. Vol., pt. i, section II, pp. 90–104.

96 U. Thakur, *op. cit.*, pp. 90–104.

all ideas of returning home and settled down there."[97] Thus, wealth was no longer despised and the puratanic indifference with which it was looked down upon was now giving place to lust for riches.

Petty though these details are and the names sometimes unidentified, they have a historical interest which may throw light on many a dark corner of Mithilā's cultural history.

(vii) From the point of sociology, the *pañjīs* are a wonderful literature which, if studied with devotion and sincerity, would throw light on the original settlements of the Maithila Brāhmaṇas and the Kāyasthas, their frequent movement and migrations and also the history of place-names and of the villages which have undergone tremendous changes since the inception of the *pañjīs*. It is a vast and complicated literature with many forms, sections and sub-sections, which, if exploited fully, would unfold many a forgotten chapters of Mithilā's cultural history. Moreover, some of the village-names (*mūlas*) preserved in the *pañjīs*, would prove to be from out-side Mithilā, if scrutinised properly.

(viii) The *pañjīs* are the only literature of its kind in the world, which went on multiplying from time to time with new additions, and alternations. It has many branches each having hundreds of sections and sub-sections, all equally important. There are one thousand branches of all *mūlas*, and there is mention of atleast two thousand and five hundred villages in the *pañjīs* of which about one thousand villages were inhabited by the *kulīnas* (*Satkulīna Brāhmaṇa*).[98] Another remarkable feature is that the *Bījī-puruṣas* of all the *kulas* were not contemporaries and that all the *mūlas* do not belong to the same time. Along with every name (*kula*) also occurs the name of the village. About two hundred *mūlas* are enumerated along with their *Bījī-puruṣa*. Names of more than a thousand villages are associated with the *mūlas* of persons whose genealogies are not found in serial order. Probably all these families (*kulas*) were uprooted in course of centuries or they might have migrated to places outside Mithilā, or they might have changed their caste.

97 *Sūktimuktāvalī*, Intro. 35.

98 R. N. Jha, *Mithilā-Bhāratī*, no. 2, pts. i-iv, pp. 114–15.

Another interesting point is the change in surnames in course of centur-ies. Vidyāpati's great-great-grandfather was Karmāditya *Tripāṭi* now Tripā-ṭhā). Similarly the surname "Kārji" has now been adopted by the Bhumihā-ras as "Kārji". Other instances are *Shukla* (derived from *Suari mūla*), *Dikṣita, Prasāda, Śarmā, Sarasvati* etc. most of which have now been discarded by the Brāhmaṇas in Mithilā. So is the case with the *mūlas*, which have undergone many changes in course of centuries[99]. This is one of the most interesting facets of this vast, obscure, mysterious and complicated literature which merits serious notice of researchers in the field of sociology.

(ix) The *pañjikāras* were the direct products of the *pañji-prabandha*. As we know, in the course of time they formed a very important institution whose contributions to Maithila society are unique. The niceties of their profe-ssion, their contributions to the development of the style (*laiā*) of the *pañjis*, to the protection of caste, their present condition and future prospects are some of the interesting aspects of social life and sociological research which are worth investigating as it would enlighten us on the socio-economic and religious trends of the periods under review. In the beginning, perhaps it was the welfare of the society that prompted the compilation and enforcement of the *pañji* which also aimed at preserving the purity of blood, but the protection of caste was not its only object. We have shown in the preceding pages that the soci-ety during this period (13th-14th centuries A. D.) was passing through several crises. The three pronged Muslim invasions had upset all the old religious and social values of the society which now needed to be drastically changed to con-form it to suit the changing needs. The decline of Buddhism through the efforts of Śaṁkarācārya, and the rise of a new Hindu religion, co-ordination of Vaidika and Tāntrika religions, the disappearance of āśrama life in early varṇā-śrama dharma and the plurality of varṇas, various ills infesting the society and the problem of re-organising it and setting up new ideals and philosophy of life, suited to the changed context became the greatest need of the hour. The *pañji-prabandha* came to the rescue of the society and instilled the sense of being Maithila among atleast the Brāhmaṇas and the Kāyasthas who inspite of the

99 R. N Jha, *op. cit.*, pp. 116-18.

fierce storms blowing from different directions, preserved their cultural traits throughout the centuries.

(x) If we study *pañjī* records side by side with the writings of Kumārila, we could be convinced that the social history of the Brāhmaṇas and the Kāyasthas of Mithilā covering a span of one thousand years and more would, infact, be the social history of the people of India, as almost the same system, in some form or other, existed in Assam, Orissa, Bengal, Gujarat, Maharashtra and other parts during this period and after. This is nodoubt a very interesting phenomenon in the cultural history of India, which has remained unexplored so far.

(xi) And, lastly, a study of the history of Maithilī language and literature would remain incomplete without the study of literary elements found in the *pañjīs*. In the *pañjī-prabandha* of both the Maithila Brāhmaṇas and Kāyasthas we have several specimens of prose and poetry, poems in *Brajabhāṣā*, Maithilī *dohā*, Sanskrit *ślokas*, Maithilī *bhajana*, specimens of Maithilī prose of the time, samples of correspondence done during the period, a few pages of *jyotiṣa* (astronomy), a few pages of the Maithilī version of the *Bhāgavata* by Manabodha; *Mantras* relating to witch craft etc. Moreover, the gradual development of Maithilī script and its different forms in ages and subsequent changes in Tirhutā (Maithilī alphabets are some of the interesting topics of study which would throw sufficient light on the evolution and growth of Maithilī language and literature from the time of Jyotirīśvara onwards.



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